BETWEEN the LINES by G.L.C.

Daily Clintonian

by Grovio
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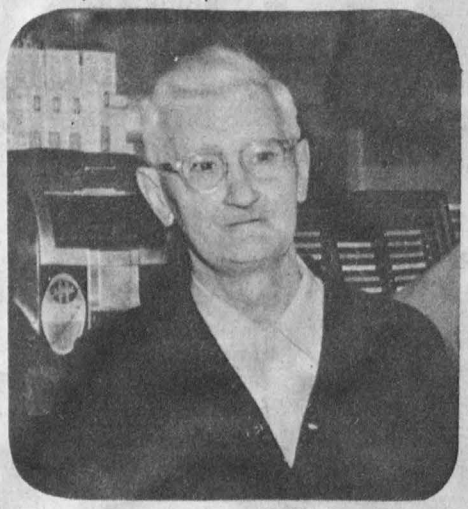
Three checks totaling almost $175,000 have been presented to groups in Clinton named in the will of Marcello and Amato "Mutt" Bondi in the past week. The three groups, the Clinton Lions Club, the Vermillion County Hospital and the Indiana Heart Association, were named beneficiaries in the will of the late Marcello and Amato Bondi, former owners and operators of the Columbus Co-op Store on North Ninth street. Bondi Family

Amato 'Mutt' Bondi

Realizing that there had to be more behind such beneficial actions, I contacted and interviewed the many persons involved in the life and times of the Bondis. The story as told by the Muzzerellis and Bonacorsis unfolds with the immigration of Marcello Muzzarelli from his home in Fanano, Italy, as a lad whose parents died early in his life. He was forced to live with first one relative and then another during his early life in Italy.



Marcello Muzzarelli Bondi

Becoming dissatisfied and hearing the stories of America, Marcello boarded a boat and landed in America in 1905. Tobey Bonacorsi tells the story of Marcello's arrival in South Wilmington, Ill., tired and hungry after a long train ride. He could speak little broken English and was a complete stranger. He met a stranger in the station who gave him an apple which he appreciated after the long train ride.

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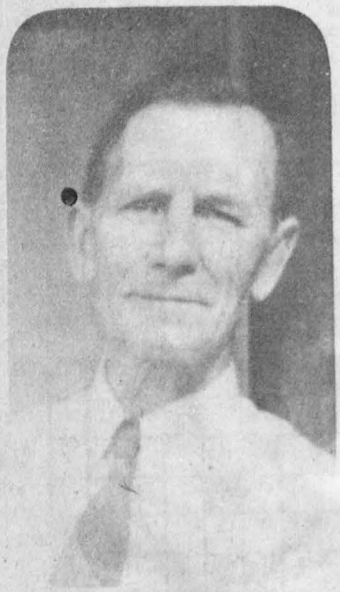
Marcello heard about the work in the Clinton mines so boarded a train for Clinton. One of his first jobs was as a bartender in one of the North Eighth street taverns. He eventually went to work in the mines and then met a Domenic Ballerini who invited him to join him in a grocery store partnership. The Christopher Columbus Society Lodge held meetings upstairs in the present Co-op store and started a grocery downstairs. It did not fair too well, and Domenic Ballerini and Marcello Bondi bought the store in 1922 and operated it for 50 years.



Domenic Ballerini

The store prospered and grew and in its heyday had a fleet of trucks, all Terreplanes, to pick up orders and then deliver them to the customers. As the business thrived, Mr. Bondi hired the five Bonacorsi brothers and their father, Louie, to work in the store. The five brothers were taught everything about running a grocery.

There are four of the five brothers still living, Tobey, Deno, Bruno and John. Joe has passed away, along with their parents, Louie and his wife, Pia. One of the highlights of Mr. Bondi's life was in 1960 when his sister from Modena, Italy visited in Clinton. It was the first time Marcello and his sister, Serena Cionine, had seen each other in 50 years. It was quite a celebration at the Bonacorsi home.

In 1908 Marcello Bondi married Katie Donna and they had one son, Amato (Mutt) Bondi. Mrs. Bondi died several years ago, and Amato and his father became partners when Amato became old enough.

Frank Muzzarelli

Frank Muzzarelli of 220 North Main street was a third cousin of Mr. Bondi, and went to work in the store in September, 1934. He worked and managed the store until 1975 when he retired after 41 years service in the store. After Mr. Bondi and his son, Amato died, very close to each other in 1975, Frank continued to manage and operate the Columbus Co-op Store until 1977 when it was sold to Edward Baumgardner of Rosedale who is the owner at present.

In talking to Frank Muzzarelli he named off some of the prices for items sold at the store in the early years of operation. One hundred pounds of potatoes sold for 79 cents, pork chops were three pounds for a quarter, a gallon of Mazola Oil was 79 cents, bread sold at 10 cents a loaf over the counter and Frank delivered Italian bread wholesale for five cents per loaf. A case of 24 bottles of Burgermaster beer sold for $1.39, eggs were 19 cents per dozen and coffee sold for 29 cents per pound.

Tobey Bonacorsi remembered that Mr. Bondi always liked to have special sales to attract customers. He would have a sale like a pound of pork steak, a pound of oleo and a loaf of bread for the price of 25 cents. Tobey said when they had those sales the butchers were kept busy all

day cutting up one pound packages of pork steak.

Mr. Bondi taught the Bonacorsi brothers the grocery business and since one of his hobbies was playing the stock market, he taught the Bonacorsis' how to make extra cash by buying and selling on the market. According to Tobey Bonacorsi and Henry Antonini, Mr. Bondi was a shrewd operator on the market.

As the store prospered Mr. Bondi decided to branch out and bought what is now Harris Food Store in 1940, and later sold to Don Harris in 1947. Frank Muzzarelli managed both stores until they were sold. According to Tobey Bonacorsi, 50 percent of the store business was on credit. Many miners and their family used their credit at the store during the summer month layoffs at the mines. When they couldn't pay, Mr. Bondi usually wrote it off on his books which endeared him to many families during the hard times. Another partner in the store was Jessie Zorzi, who was in charge of feed sales at the store.

In 1935 the Bonacorsi brothers decided to start their own grocery business and bought their present store on Main street in downtown Clinton, which was formerly Biggs Grocery. They continued their business for almost 45 years before selling their store to Andy Rowe a year ago.

According to Frank Muzzarelli, a new idea in store-customer relationship was innovated when Mr. Bondi purchased the Harris Store. It was the first "self-service" independent grocery in the midwest and was known as the "Market Basket."

In closing this narrative it is fitting to observe that only in America could a penniless immigrant come to this land, work hard, save well and then remember the community and its people so well that he left thousands of dollars to be spent for the betterment of his adopted homeland, Clinton, Ind.

Columbus Co-op float

Marcello Bondi always enjoyed the Columbus Day Parade and had a float in the parade many years. The Christopher Columbus Society sponsored the parade in the early years and when the society disbanded the Dreamland Pleasure Club took over. Finally the Clinton Lions sponsored the parade until its final disbandonment in the 1970's. Shown with their float standing, left to right, are Chester Valerine, Albert Valerine, Domenic Ballerini, Joe Bonacorsi, Tobey Bonacorsi, driving the float; Nifty Cinotto, Bill Lawson, Deno Bonacorsi and standing at the end of the float is Marcello Bondi. On the float, left to right, are Frances Valerine, Margaret Ciocatto, Pete Muzzarelli, Frankie Gene Turchi, Bruno Bonacorsi, Bruno Contri, Marie Karanovich and Clara Avenatti.